

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5966

As Passed House:
February 29, 2012

Title: An act relating to establishing the office of the health care authority ombudsman.

Brief Description: Establishing the office of the health care authority ombudsman.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Fraser and Swecker).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care & Wellness: 2/16/12, 2/20/12 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/29/12, 83-15.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Health Care Authority Ombudsman to assist retired enrollees in the Public Employees Benefits Board program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Jinkins, Vice Chair; Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Clibborn, Green, Kelley, Moeller and Van De Wege.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Harris.

Staff: Valerie Rickman (786-7119).

Background:

The Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC) oversees the state's insurance industry. Insurance for public employees is available through the Washington State Health Care Authority and the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The OIC is required to collect certain information from medical insurance providers. Beginning in 2011, each provider of medical insurance under the PEBB program was required to annually submit to the OIC a summary of customer service complaints. The OIC is required to aggregate the information received from each health plan into a report to the Legislature. In September 2011 the Washington State Health Care Authority submitted a report to the Legislature of the PEBB customer service complaints and appeals.

Another function of the OIC is to provide education and support services about health insurance to the general public. Education and support services are provided free of charge by volunteers through the Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA). Assistance through the SHIBA includes, but is not limited to, information about Medicare, Medicaid, Basic Health, the Children's Health Insurance program, and the Washington State Health Insurance Pool.

Summary of Bill:

The Health Care Authority Ombudsman (Ombudsman) is created as a volunteer position within the OIC. The Ombudsman is responsible for assisting retired enrollees in the PEBB program. Assistance may include helping retired enrollees with questions and concerns, as well as assisting the PEBB to identify retiree concerns. The Ombudsman must be trained as part of the OIC's volunteer training related to the SHIBA program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill will help retirees understand the health care plans that are available and more easily sign up for those plans.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Fraser, prime sponsor; and George Masten, Retired Public Employees of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.